

Ottoman Messages in Kind

Emotions and Diplomatic Gifts

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A diamond is forever

About 75 years ago, a smart copywriter coined a new tag line – ‘A diamond is forever’ – for his client, De Beers. A new symbol of eternal love was created, and the diamond became the almost obligatory gem of election for engagement rings.¹ In the Middle Ages through to early modern times, however, these stones carried a connotation of boldness and were predominantly worn by men.² In the early modern Ottoman context, diamonds were evidently a symbol of power, for in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find diamonds mainly in the possession of high-ranking viziers.³ In gift-giving, they played practically no role outside the royal family and courtly circles, although they do appear in diplomatic gifts in the eighteenth century.⁴

Ottoman society and love

Since the methodological ‘emotional turn’ more than a decade ago, a vast corpus of literature has emerged in this field.⁵ In this short article I will mainly draw on a

¹ See ELEONOR PICCIOTTO, ‘“A Diamond is Forever” Became More Than Just a Tagline,’ *The Eye of Jewellery*. <https://theeyeofjewellery.com/de-beers/de-beers-jewelry/de-beers-most-famous-ad-campaign-marked-the-entire-diamond-industry/> (accessed 6 May 2022).

² SAMUEL TOLANSKY, ‘Some Folklore and History of Diamond,’ *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 109, no. 5062 (September 1961): 747–48.

³ HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, ‘Diamonds are a Vizier’s Best Friends: Merzifonlu Kara Mustafa Pasha’s Jewelry Assets,’ in *Living the Good Life: Consumption in the Qing and Ottoman Empires of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Elif Akçetin and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 409–32.

⁴ Istanbul, T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi (formerly: T.C. Başbakanlığı Osmanlı Arşivi. Henceforth: BOA) Cevdet Saray 832; Mal. Müd. 9054, p. 675, and Tokapı Sarayı Müzesi Arşivi (henceforth: TSMA) E. 70. The list of gifts for Empress Maria Theresia is dated 11 Muharrem 1161/11 February 1748.

⁵ This is not the place to detail a bibliography of emotion studies, hence I shall mention only a few of the more significant titles: JONAS LILIEQUIST, ed., *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), esp. ‘Introduction,’ and BARBARA H. ROSENWEIN’s chapter, ‘Theories of Change in the History of Emotions,’ 1–6, 7–20. See also GERHARD JARITZ, ed., *Emotions and Material Culture* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2003); MONIQUE SCHEER, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion,’ *History and Theory* 51 (May 2012): 193–220. This literature focuses on European history, and mainly on the Middle Ages. For a more differentiated view, it might be useful to consult VICTOR KARANDASHEV, *Cultural Model of Emotions* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, [2021]).

paper by Walter Andrews on emotions in the Ottoman realm.⁶ Andrews constructs a conceptual diagram showing a ‘cycle of emotion generators’ centring on ‘love.’⁷ Among the features incorporated in this cycle he includes a ‘political node’ (also termed ‘livelihood’ or ‘subsistence node’), encompassing ‘structures of gift and reward.’ He concedes, however, that in this political sphere ‘we are least likely to take seriously [...] the Ottoman focus on the emotional content.’⁸ In this context he instances the example of a miniature depicting a beautiful young male proffering flowers to the sultan. Andrews terms the picture a ‘typical Ottoman love scene,’⁹ which is true but in Ottoman reality, outside an idealised poetic sphere, presenting flowers was more often than not a method for squeezing a ‘reward’ (usually some money) out of the recipient.¹⁰ Indeed, the miniature in Andrew’s example refers to the poet Sehi’s plea to become the *defterdar* (finance minister).¹¹

The nature of Ottoman gift traffic

Before trying to detect traces of emotion in Ottoman gifts, we should first take a short look at the Ottoman system of giving and receiving presents, which at least until the eighteenth century largely rested on the notion of *pişkeş*,¹² gifts, pretty close to a tribute, presented by an underling and graciously received by an individual of higher rank. To some extent in contrast to Marcel Mauss’s theory expounded in his classic *Essai sur le don*,¹³ the Ottomans did not always practise reciprocity. A higher-ranking individual might respond to a present from an inferior with a favour or general benignity. The concept of *pişkeş* is a case that calls into question the voluntariness of a gift. It operated much like a tribute in the sense that it was by and large normal for such presents to be demanded from inferiors. Moreover, lavish gifts were required when needing to rely on someone’s help or favour. Diplomatic gift traffic did not substantially differ from the domestic mode of pleasing and honouring colleagues and superiors with official presents. During the sixteenth century, Ottoman protocol demanded a similar approach to the diplomatic traffic of objects, namely, lavish gifts would primarily be

⁶ WALTER ANDREWS, ‘Ottoman Love: Preface to a Theory of Emotional Ecology,’ in *A History of Emotions, 1200-1800*, ed. Jonas Lieliequist (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), 21–47. On love in early Ottoman political thought and language, see NIL TEKGÜL, ‘Early Modern Ottoman Politics of Emotion: What Has Love Got to Do with It?’, *Turkish Historical Review* 10 (2019): 132–54.

⁷ ANDREWS, ‘Ottoman Love,’ 25.

⁸ ANDREWS, ‘Ottoman Love,’ 38.

⁹ ANDREWS, ‘Ottoman Love,’ 38.

¹⁰ See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty. The daily life of Silahdar Mustafa, éminence grise in the final years of Murad IV (1635-1640)* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2016), 43. STEPHAN GERLACH, *Stephan Gerlachs deß Aeltern Tage-Buch/ Der von zween Glorwürdigsten Römischen Kaysern/ Maximiliano und Rudolpho, Beyderseits den Andern diese Nahmens/ Höchstseeligster Gedächtniß/ An die Ottomanische Pforte zu Constantinopel Abgefertigten/ ... Gesandtschaft* (Franckfurt am Mayn: In Verlegung Johann-David Zunners. Gedruckt bey Heinrich Friesen, 1674), 318.

¹¹ ANDREWS, ‘Ottoman Love,’ 39.

¹² On the term, see FILİZ KARACA, ‘Pişkeş,’ in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* 34 (Istanbul, 2007): 294–96; ANN K.S. LAMBTON, ‘Pishkash,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed., VIII (Leiden, 1993), 312–13 and LAMBTON, ‘Pishkash: Present or Tribute?’, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57, no. 1 (1994): 145–58.

¹³ MARCEL MAUSS, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

bestowed on a partner whose power outshone one's own position. This mode of giving actually dated back to the late fifteenth century, but was less visible due to the political entanglements of the time. This approach meant that the Porte largely avoided making offerings to rulers of countries not regarded as equals.

Luxury for Matthias Corvinus

After Bayezid II came to the throne in the late fifteenth century, there was a lively dispatching of gifts to Europe despite the Ottomans ranking Europe's rulers and people as inferior, since they were non-Muslims.

As early as October or November 1484, it is recorded that the sultan dispatched his master of the stables, İlyas Beğ, to the king of Hungary (in these years Matthias Corvinus, r. 1458-90) with an offering worth approximately 47,000 *akçe*. The assortment, containing several luxury fabrics, carpets and silverware,¹⁴ was a classic set of gifts for a Christian ruler. The background behind this relatively sumptuous package was Bayezid II's tricky situation following his brother Cem's defection to the Knights of St John in Rhodes in 1482, from where they took him to France. He was highly coveted as an extraordinarily valuable pawn in European and Mamluk power play. As such, Matthias Corvinus had shown particular persistence in trying to get hold of the unfortunate prince.¹⁵ In all likelihood, the official reason for İlyas Beğ's mission to Buda was to ratify the peace treaty (*'abdnâme*) of 1483, which, by covering the Hungarian king's back, enabled Hungary to march against Vienna in 1485. After the *'abdnâme* had been agreed, however, its future was jeopardised by Bayezid's conquest of Kilia and Akkerman in the summer of 1484. Therefore, the intention behind the

¹⁴ TSMA, E. 857. The consignment contained: two dress-lengths (? or bolts?) of gold-brocaded velvet from Bursa with dots (*benek*), probably referring to the three dots of the *chintamani* pattern; two dress-lengths (? or bolts?) of gold-brocaded voided velvet (*çatma*); ten pieces (dress-lengths?) of *kemba* (a thickly woven silk fabric with a lampas structure and brocaded surface; HÜLYA TEZCAN, *Atlaslar Atlası: Pamuklu, Yün ve İpek Kumaş Koleksiyonu / Cotton, Woolen and Silk Fabrics Collection* (Istanbul: YKY, 1993), 32) in the style (or from the area) of Yazd; four pieces of striped (*alaca*) velvet from Bursa; six pieces of *muş dendan* (lit. 'mouse tooth,' probably referring to a pattern), a fabric (?) I was not able to identify; four pieces of white *bayramî* fabric; two sashes (*kuşak*) in the style (or from the area) of Yazd; two gold-brocaded sashes from Bursa; ten (dress-lengths? bolts?) of *sof* (camelot); six pieces of uncut velvet (*iplik kadife*); ten pieces of red (*kırmızı*) *kemba* from Bursa; four pieces of gold-brocaded Armenian *kemba*; 20 pieces of *peşorî kemba*; five carpets (*kali*) from Menemen; four *niello* (? lit. 'mixed') silver tankards; four silver trays (*tepsi*); and 20 silver goblets, four of them large (*deve tabanı*) and 12 *Lazî* (Laz). Michael Rogers has found cups of this type in Bayezid II's treasury inventory of 1505 and located the origin of the silver used as the area of Gümüşhane: J. MICHAEL ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory of the Reign of Beyazid II,' in *Comité international d'études pré-ottomanes et ottomanes: VIth Symposium, Cambridge, 1st-4th July 1984*, eds Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont and Emeri van Donzel (Istanbul: Divit Matbaacılık ve Yayıncılık, 1987), 50.

¹⁵ See L[OUI]S THUASNE, *Djem-Sultan, fils de Mohammed II, frère de Bayezid II (1459-1495) d'après les documents originaux en grande partie inédits. Étude sur la question d'Orient à la fin du XV^e siècle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), 127-28, 143-50. Nicolas Vatin, *Sultan Djem. Un prince ottoman dans l'Europe du XV^e siècle d'après deux sources contemporaines: Vâkı'ât-ı Sultân Cem, Œuvres de Guillaume Caoursin* (Ankara: TTK and IFEA, 1997), 38.

dispatch of quite a high official, such as the master of the stables,¹⁶ with gifts of such a substantial value would definitely have been for appeasement in the delicate matter of Prince Cem.

The traffic of diplomatic gifts to European courts continued over the following years. But after the death of the ill-fated prince in 1495, the stream of offerings sent by Bayezid II to western powers began to dry up, even more so after Cem's body was eventually returned to his homeland in 1499. During the sixteenth century, diplomatic gifts to western rulers were a rarity since in practice the Porte's foreign policy was mainly in the hands of governors administrating border provinces. While they would sometimes send small presents to the other side, these items (such as carpets, horses, saddles and other horse tack) were more like the sort of official gifts given in the domestic sphere and exchanged between governors and their colleagues in neighbouring provinces. Thus, the difference between diplomatic and domestic gifts became blurred. Since both types belonged to the same concept of official giving and depended on each other, they will be discussed together in this article. This broad approach should enable us to discern whether there are in fact any traces of emotion in the Ottoman gift cycle.

Notes accompanying the gifts

At first glance, the most promising source of evidence for emotional practices seems to be the notes that accompanied gifts in the domestic sphere. But the rather small number of examples I have studied,¹⁷ mainly from the legate of Silahdar Mustafa Pasha (approx. 1609–42),¹⁸ are either just lists of the items dispatched or nevertheless fairly homogenous in their content.

A document from 10 June 1639 names a number of gifts¹⁹ sent by Ebubekir Pasha.²⁰ Two expense registers of Mustafa Pasha²¹ mention Bekir Pasha. In May 1636, he appears in a *defter* (register) as governor of Temeşvar, but a few days earlier an entry in another document referring to the same gifts presents him as administrating the

¹⁶ Normally, the Porte would send lower ranks, such as *çavuşlar*, on diplomatic missions; see for example MARIA PIA PEDANI, 'Ottoman Diplomats in the West: The Sultan's Ambassadors to the Republic of Venice,' *Tarih İncelemeleri Dergisi* 11, no. 1 (1996): 187–202, here 187–88. KEMAL BEYDİLLİ, 'Sefaret ve Sefaretnâmeler Hakkında Yeni bir Değerlendirme,' *Journal of Ottoman Studies* XXX (2007): 13.

¹⁷ Due to the pandemic, I have had to rely on a few notes I made 17 years ago. I used TSMA, E. 992/2; E.992/3; E. 992/4; E. 992/5; E. 992/6; E. 992/8; E. 992/9; E. 992/10; E. 992/11; E. 992/12; E. 992/13; E. 992/14; E. 992/15; E. 992/16; E. 992/17; E. 992/18; E. 992/19.

¹⁸ See REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty*, and the literature quoted there.

¹⁹ TSMA, E. 992/2; the document lists two banners from Fes, two coral rosaries, two young male 'Frankish' slaves, two rifles, one jewelled fan, two 'Frankish' chairs, two blankets (*velense*) ornamented with gold, three silken sofa covers (*ibram*) ornamented with gold, three camlet (*sof*) sofa covers ornamented with gold, four red sofa covers, three pairs of stirrups, three wrappers of serge (*saye çukâ*), three wrappers of 'Frankish' satin (*atlas*), one velvet wrapper and silk turbans (*serbend*) ornamented with gold.

²⁰ Ebubekir (Bekir) Pasha became admiral (*kapitan-ı derya*) in 1644, but died three months after his appointment; see İSMAIL HÂMİ DANIŞMEND, *Osmanlı Devlet Erkâm* (Istanbul: Türkiye Yayınevi, 1971), 191 note 60.

²¹ TSMA, D. 525 and D. 3194.

province of Kanije (Kanizsa in West Hungary).²² The *beğlerbeği* of Temeşvar, Bekir Pasha, was executed in late autumn of that year.²³ A document refers to the governor of Kanije of that name for the years 1630 and 1631, but a slightly later record, dated 16 August 1631, calls him a ‘former governor of Kanije’ who now had the *sancak* (sub-province) of İstolni Belgrad (Székesfehérvár in Hungary) as *arpalık*.²⁴ For the period between February 1634 and September 1641, we do not know who occupied the governorship of Kanije.²⁵ Yet, it is not implausible that Bekir Pasha was reinstalled in Kanije. Thus, we cannot be sure whether the Bekir Pashas in Silahdar Mustafa’s records always refer to the same person. However, were they different namesakes, we might expect to find some hints such as bynames in the bookkeeping. The connection between Bekir and Silahdar Mustafa must have begun prior to May 1636, since in November of that year Silahdar Mustafa spent 1,000 *akçe* ‘for the corps of Şahin the Elder, who had come from Bekir Pasha.’²⁶ As the gift package from May 1636 apparently did not encompass a slave, Şahin must have been an earlier gift. He died during an epidemic (the plague?) which carried off many of Silahdar Mustafa’s slaves, and his master paid for his burial. For May 1637 and late March 1638 we find references to Bekir as governor of Rhodes.²⁷ The objects and slaves he offered do not point to a very close relationship between the two pashas. I shall deal below with the question of slaves as gifts. Bekir Paşa’s note from 1639 reads in translation:

After I rubbed [my] face in the blessed dust of the felicity of [Your] Excellency, my fortunate and auspicious sultan,²⁸ my insignificant petition is this: I do not have a little something which would be appropriate for the dust of the glory of [Your] Excellency, my fortunate and auspicious sultan. [Hence] it is pleaded to excuse the deficiency. For the rest, my sultan has the order and command. [Your] servant Ebubekir.

This document deserves our attention for several reasons. The style resembles a petition to the sultan. To rub one’s face in the dust (of the ruler’s feet) describes the performance of a *proskynesis* and is often a metaphor for attending a royal audience. In this respect, we must not forget that Silahdar Mustafa Pasha was Murad IV’s favourite and acted in a way as his *alter ego*. The diction of the letter also reveals subservience to and a certain distance from the recipient. In all likelihood, Bekir Pasha’s gift-giving was

²² D. 525, fol. 69a (dated 12 Zilhicce 1045/18 May 1636). D. 3194, fol. 2b (dated 30 Zilka’de 1045/6 May 1636) registers the same gift package (two rifles and one silver battle axe). I am grateful to Feridun Emecen who deciphered the place name for me.

²³ NAİMA MUSTAFA EFENDİ, *Tarih-i Na’ımâ (Ravzatü’l-Hüseyn fi Hulâsati Abbâri’l-Hâfikayn)*, II, ed. Mehmet İpşirli (Ankara: TTK, 2007), 852–3.

²⁴ AZİZ ALTI and SALİH BAŞKUTLU, ‘Kanije Eyaleti İdareciler,’ *SDU Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 50 (August 2020): 207–8. I thank Kemal Beydilli for the reference. An *arpalık* is an income from a province which the usufructuary does not administer; see CAHİT BALTACI, ‘Arpalık,’ in TDV *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 3 (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İslâm Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 1991), 392–3.

²⁵ ALTI and BAŞKUTLU, ‘Kanije Eyaleti İdareciler,’ 208.

²⁶ D. 3194, fol. 37a: *Büyük Şahin meyyitine, Bekir Paşa’dan gelmiş idi*.

²⁷ D. 3194, fol. 8b. Here he appears as donor of a male ‘Frankish’ slave, two Algerian rifles, four Algerian blankets (*valence*), four red sofa covers (*ibram*), four belts, three low couches (*mak’ad*) and two dress-lengths of velvet. D. 3194., fols. 12a/b, Bekir Pasha sent another comparable collection, but this time it did not contain a slave.

²⁸ The term *sultanım* here is an honorific address, comparable to ‘my lord.’

part of a strategy to further his career. Maybe he did not yet consider his aspirations fulfilled.

Even more formal and distant is the letter Defterdar Mehmed Pasha attached to his list of gifts for Silahdar Mustafa. After apologising for not having something worthy enough²⁹ he writes that he submits the presents ‘insolently (*ber-vech-i küstabi*) into the dust under the foot’ of Mustafa Pasha.³⁰

A note that seems much more personal is the address of the governor of Egypt³¹ calling the recipient of his dispatch ‘your excellency, my excellent and auspicious son Silahdar Pasha’ (*‘izzetliü ve sa‘adetliü ođlümüz Silahdar Paşa hazretlerine*).³² In his enumeration of gifts for Mustafa Pasha, grand vizier Bayram Pasha³³ used much the same address.³⁴

Although this appellation has a familiar tone, the term ‘my son’ points primarily to the donor’s superior status as well as a difference in age. After all, the Ottoman approach to hierarchy within the family was characterised by obedience to the father. Thus, the writer of the first address was in all likelihood Hüseyin Pasha, who might have been 15 to 20 years Mustafa’s senior, while Sultanzade Mehmed Pasha was much closer to Silahdar Mustafa in terms of age. Additionally, both dignitaries, Hüseyin and Mustafa, had a common background in the royal palace. In one case, we do not know when Hüseyin Pasha endowed Silahdar Pasha with a black eunuch slave, who also became an epidemic victim in early 1638.³⁵

Towards the end of 1639, Mehmed Pasha dispatched a (‘not appropriate’ according to the conventions) gift package to Mustafa that, alongside some minor

²⁹ This remark is a standard component of notes accompanying gifts. We also find it in a letter (probably from 1548) from Hürrem Sultan to the Polish king: see UĞUR ÜNAL and WŁADYSŁAW STĘPNIAK, eds, *Yoldaki Elçi: Osmanlı’dan Günümüze Türk-Leh İlişkileri/Posel w drodze: Stosunki turecko – polskie od czasów osmańskich do dnia dzisiejszego* (Istanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, 2014), 36–37, note 18.

³⁰ E. 992/6 (dated 20 Cemazi II 1049/18 October 1639). The gifts consisted of a suit of armour and a multitude of textiles, many of them ornamented with gold.

³¹ Silahdar Mustafa was on very friendly terms with (Deli) Hüseyin Pasha (governor of Egypt 1635–7); D. 525, fol. 27b; D. 3194, fols. 9a, 31a, 41b, 122b. Both men had begun their careers in the royal palace where they received their education. For Hüseyin Pasha, see TAHSİN YILDIRIM, ‘Girit Serdarı Gazi Deli Hüseyin Paşa Hayatı, İcraatı ve Hayratı’ (MA thesis: Fatih Sultan Mehmed Vakf Üniversitesi, 2019). Mustafa Pasha was on good terms with Hüseyin Pasha’s successor (Sultanzade), Mehmed Pasha (governor of Egypt 1637–40), as well. D. 3194, fols. 10b, 116a. For Mehmed Pasha, see FERİDUN EMECEN, ‘Mehmed Pasha, Sultanzâde,’ in *TDV Diyanet İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, Ek 2 (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, İslâm Ansiklopedisi Genel Müdürlüğü, 2019), 227–29.

³² E. 992/8. The document is unfortunately not dated, so we do not know for certain which governor of Egypt was the sender. The record has only two lists of the sent items (ten purses of cash (*guruş*), a horse completely equipped with golden tack, flank armour and unbelievers’ stirrups, two saddled horses), the second being ‘gifts hopefully given from Konya’ (a fully equipped horse with golden tack and everything else needed, four saddled horses, a robe lined with sable fur, ten *surre guruş* in cash, a kind of kaftan, two *surre gurus*, two wrappers with rarities, 15 camels).

³³ For Bayram Pasha, see GÜLNUR HEDİYE ÇINAR, ‘Sadrazam Bayram Paşa ve icraatları’ (MA thesis, Fatih Sultan Mehmed Vakf Üniversitesi, 2016).

³⁴ E. 992/17 (dated 16 Muharrem 1048/30 May 1638). The document reads: ‘*‘izzetliü sa‘adetliü ođlümüz hazretlerinin buşur-u ‘izzetlerine gönderilecek hediye: nakdiye, kese on; altın rabt ve yancığı ile mükemmel at ve yelkendez iki at.*’

³⁵ D. 3194, fol. 41b.

items, comprised two black eunuchs. The accompanying letter does not address Mustafa as ‘my son,’ but beyond good wishes for his health, expresses the hope that Mustafa would not deprive the writer of his protection (*saye*).³⁶ This is a clear indication of a relationship of soft dependency.

While the expression ‘my son’ in Ottoman correspondence does not necessarily indicate intimate friendship but stresses superior rank, there are terms of endearment that do signal close ties and love. We see this in a note³⁷ signed *bende Mahmud*, bearing the address *benim sa‘adetli birtanem* (‘my auspicious only one’) and accompanying a collection of fabrics for Silahdar Mustafa Pasha. This Mahmud must be the pasha’s younger brother who had every reason to call Mustafa ‘my only one’; in 1636, the pasha had bestowed no fewer than 100,000 *akçe* on his brother Mahmud.³⁸

Even our very limited range of samples suggests that in the Ottoman context gifts did not necessarily carry a message of the donor’s positive feelings such as love. In many cases, offerings were purely a matter of duty and convention. We have to bear in mind that donor and recipient in the domestic gift traffic of the Ottoman ruling elite were mostly heads of a household that, next to their family, encompassed the servants, slaves and guards living under their control. Sumptuous gift packages containing multiple fabrics were often not so much destined to the single recipient as the members of the household. In this respect, the approach of the royal court to diplomatic gifts did not differ very much from domestic giving in the upper echelons of society. Furthermore, the tradition of gift-giving rested upon the clear notion of *pişkeş*, as already said. These features made gifting a somewhat impersonal practice.

Objects of affection

A closer look into the records of gifts shows, however, that the items being offered could themselves communicate cordiality and affection. In contrast to our present-day diamonds, upmarket luxuries did not convey such a personal message. Rather, underwear did: it signalled intimacy and friendship, unlike in modern times bearing no sexual connotation.

The most famous example of this symbolism is a gift that Hürrem Sultan,³⁹ Süleyman the Magnificent’s beloved wife, dispatched (in 1548 or 1549) to the Polish

³⁶ E. 992/9. The letter is undated, but a small note that a ‘complete’ silver pence had been gifted to the chamberlain (*çukadar*) bears the date 8 Ramazan 1049/2 January 1640. Mehmed Pasha’s other presents were four purses of *akçe*, ten sword blades and eight ornamented bows, one of which was propelled (? *perwane*). In spring 1638, Mehmed Pasha had sent six purses of *guruş*, two purses of *akçe* and a complete set of horse equipment

³⁷ E. 992/15 (undated).

³⁸ REINDL-KIEL, *Leisure, Pleasure – and Duty*, 12 note 41. In this period, an unskilled construction worker would earn approximately 15 *akçe* per day; see ŞEVKET PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar ve Ücretler, 1469-1998/500 Years of Prices and Wages in Istanbul and Other Cities* (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü, 2000), 70.

³⁹ See LESLIE PEIRCE, *Empress of the East: How a Slave Girl Became Queen of the Ottoman Empire* (London: Icon Books, 2020).

king, Sigismund II Augustus. In the accompanying note she informed him that she was sending ‘two pairs of underpants with waist-strings and vests, six towels and one napkin’ lest her letter [full] of affection (*mektub-ı muhabbet*) remain unaccompanied.⁴⁰ This message is a key to understanding the notion of underwear as a gift. Although Hürrem Sultan seems to have helped make the various pieces with her own hands, the nature of the gift and the letter were undoubtedly more the product of Ottoman protocol than her personal initiative.⁴¹ As we have noted, during most of the sixteenth century, the Porte had avoided the dispatch of gifts to European rulers, fearing that such offerings could be used for propaganda purposes. In the Ottoman archives, I did not find a single trace of diplomatic gifts to Poland throughout the whole sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, except the objects listed in Hürrem Sultan’s letter (which is kept in the Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw). It is questionable whether we can classify this type of ‘private’ offering of modest value from monarch to monarch as a diplomatic gift, for the distinction is fluid.

Presents of underwear belonged to the private sphere and were fairly popular in the upper echelons of Ottoman society,⁴² perhaps because they were an inexpensive means to assure a dignitary of the donor’s sincere friendship. We must not forget that the social pressure to incessantly present gifts also entailed a serious financial burden. Indeed, we might well compare the emotions of donors with our own feelings today when paying taxes. Belonging to the same category as these more private and personal gifts are pillows (*yüzcü yastığı*),⁴³ at times offered together with underwear or other smaller textile items, such as napkins or turban covers,⁴⁴ and perhaps face towels. Yet the favourite means of making friendship visible and tangible remained underwear. Formal gift packages (in domestic as well as diplomatic traffic) of an official nature would by contrast never contain underwear or pillows.

As our knowledge of Ottoman gifting practices is largely based on treasury and expenses registers, some types of presents tend to be less visible. Nevertheless, next to textiles, the most frequent gifts among the ruling elites and to a certain degree in the diplomatic traffic of gift items were probably noble horses. They do not usually appear in treasury or expenses registers since they were incorporated into the recipients’ stables and recorded in separate ledgers. Noble horses with exquisite equipment were an essential signifier of status for members of the elite, including the royal court.

⁴⁰ ÜNAL and STĘPNIAK, eds, *Yoldaki Elçi*, 36–37.

⁴¹ The Ottoman protocol must have seen this arrangement as a diplomatic masterpiece. For the background to this dispatch, see HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, ‘Learning the Language of Things: Glimpses into Ottoman Inventories of the 16th and 17th Centuries,’ in *Festschrift Claudia Römer* (forthcoming).

⁴² See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, ‘Pracht und Ehre. Zum Geschenkwesen im Osmanischen Reich,’ in *Das Osmanische Reich in seinen Archivalien und Chroniken*, eds Nejat Göyünç zu Ehren, Klaus Kreiser, and Christoph K. Neumann (Istanbul: Franz Steiner, 1997), 177–79.

⁴³ See, for example, TSMA, D. 1014, fols. 10b and 12b.

⁴⁴ BOA, MAD 14724, pp. 3, 4, 16, 22, 27, 28.

Slaves as gifts

Furthermore, as we have seen, the upper echelon of society favoured another type of living gift: slaves.⁴⁵ In 1592, Lorenzo Bernardo, a former Venetian *bailo* to Constantinople, remarked that Turks showed their *'grandezza'* with a multitude of slaves and horses.⁴⁶ Thus, a great number of slaves signalled a powerful person and household. This in turn made slaves a perfect gift between Ottoman grandees, particularly because considerable affluence was required to feed and clothe these individuals over time.⁴⁷

Madeline Zilfi states that during the fifteenth and the early seventeenth century, 'slavery showed a pronounced masculine tilt.'⁴⁸ It seems, however, that in the later seventeenth century, the ratio between male and female Ottoman slaves more or less struck a balance and, by the mid-eighteenth century, Ottoman slavery had a predominantly female face.⁴⁹ More often than not, these individuals received a solid training and education in the donor's household before being given away. Hence, they would spend a longer period of time under the control and influence of the donor, who would do his best to ensure that his slaves were linked to his household with a bond of loyalty or even affection. Well-trained slaves were not only expensive, they could gain influence in the beneficiary's household and eventually play a bridging function between donor and recipient. This also applied to the valuable, much sought-after black eunuchs, who not only served as guardians and intermediaries of elite harems, but often achieved positions of special trust in the household and beyond. These individuals were lucky to end up in an elite household where they were usually treated well, as their owners relied on them.

Many grandees' treasury and expenses registers suggest that dignitaries would pass the larger part of the gifts onto the servants and slaves within their household. In

⁴⁵ Ottoman slavery is no longer a neglected topic among historians; for an excellent introduction into and evaluation of the considerable literature, see SURAIYA FAROQHI, *Slavery in the Ottoman World: A Literature Survey* (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2017); EHUD R. TOLEDANO, *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998); TOLEDANO, *As If Silent and Absent: Bonds of Enslavement in the Islamic Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); TOLEDANO, 'The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies. Dichotomy or Continuum,' in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, eds Toru Miura and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 159–75; and HAKAN Y. ERDEM, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800-1909* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

⁴⁶ Lorenzo Bernardo, 'Relazione dell'Impero Ottomano di Lorenzo Bernardo, 1592,' in EUGENIO ALBÈRI, *Relazioni degli ambasciatori Veneti al senato*, Serie III^a – Volume II^o (Florence, 1844), 368: *La parsimonia poi, secondo fondamento della grandezza turchesca, era prima grandissima fra di loro: perchè il Turco prima non curava il delicato mangiare, nè li ricchi addobbamenti di casa, ma solo si contentava di pane e riso, e del solo tappeto e cuscino; tutta la sua grandezza la mostrava nel numero dei molti schiavi e cavalli, con li quali potesse servir meglio al suo signore; onde non è meraviglia se ha potuto tollerare tante fatiche, e sopportare tanti disagi solo per vincere e dominare.*

⁴⁷ See MADELINE C. ZILFI, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 192.

⁴⁸ ZILFI, *Women and Slavery*, 191.

⁴⁹ ZILFI, *Women and Slavery*, 195.

some cases, elite slaves almost became family members⁵⁰ and achieved high positions, so that their status as slaves might have been almost imperceptible. All in all, we can be confident in assuming that gifts of slaves implied feelings of friendship towards the recipient.

Well-trained male slaves could also be a part of diplomatic gifts, as long as the political climate between the donor and recipient allowed for it. I have, however, never come across female slaves as presents. As for Christian rulers or heretical Muslim monarchs, such as the shah of Iran, a political foe and champion of the Twelver Shi'a, they would of course never have received slaves of any gender as a gift of diplomatic traffic.

Slaves for the sultan of Egypt

A so-called *in'amat defteri* ('register of benefactions,' actually a register of daily expenses, *ruḡnamçe defteri*) from Bayezid II's time lists several sets of diplomatic gifts to Muslim monarchs. On 11 July 1507, the head of the Ottoman *'ulufecis* (palace troops), Kemal Beğ, was sent marching off to the Sultan of Egypt⁵¹ (Qansawh al-Gawrī, r. 1501–16) with a lavish collection of gifts. Kemal Beğ brought the sultan 30 male slaves, a range of luxury fabrics from Italy and of domestic production, and an assortment of fur plates (*tabta*),⁵² of sable, lynx (the precious fur from the belly), ermine and blue (*kebud*) miniver (*keremün*) fur,⁵³ nine of each sort.⁵⁴ As the number nine is a sacred number in

⁵⁰ DROR ZE'EVİ, 'My Slave, My Son, My Lord: Slavery, Family and State in the Islamic Middle East,' in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa*, eds Toru Miura and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 79–80.

⁵¹ *İrsaliye be-Sultan-ı Mısır*, Istanbul, Atatürk Kitaplığı, Muallim Cevdet (henceforth: MC) 71, fol. 107b. Ibn İyâs reports on the Ottoman embassy to Egypt in autumn 1507 but makes no mention of gifts: see IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen eines ägyptischen Bürgers*, trans. Annemarie Schimmel (s.l. [Munich]: Goldmann Verlag, 1988), 88–9. ELIAS I. MUHANNA, 'The Sultan's New Clothes: Ottoman-Mamluk Gift Exchange in the Fifteenth Century,' *Muqarnas* XXVII (2010): 195 note 47 (following Feridun Ahmed Beğ, *Me'mu'a-yı Münşe'at al-Selâtin*, I ([Istanbul]: 1848), 341) gives 18 October 1507 as a date for the embassy, but states that no gifts are mentioned. On the mutual form of address and titles between Ottoman and Mamluk rulers, see CIHAN YÜKSEL MUSLU, 'Attempting to Understand the Language of Diplomacy between the Ottomans and the Mamluks (1340s-1512),' *Archivum Ottomanicum* 30 (2013): 247–67.

⁵² The term is used for a piece which is sewn together with several parts of fur of matching colour and derivation, fairly similar to modern fur 'plates' (or 'bodies'). Unlike modern 'plates'/'bodies,' however, the Ottoman term does not indicate a fixed size; see HÜLYA TEZCAN, 'Furs and Skins Owned by the Sultans,' in *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*, eds SURAIYA FAROQHI and CHRISTOPH K. NEUMANN (Istanbul: Eren, 2004), 66.

⁵³ The colour blue in this context is less outlandish than may seem at first sight. Furs were dyed from early times onward, and indigo was an export product from Russia, the main source for Middle Eastern luxury furs: see ALEXANDRE BENNIGSEN and CHANTAL LEMERCIER-QUELQUEJAY, 'Les marchands de la cour ottoman et le commerce des fourrures moscovites dans la seconde moitié du XVI^e siècle,' *Cahiers du Monde russe et soviétique* 11, no. 3 (1970): 368.

⁵⁴ The dispatch also comprised gifts to the grandees of the Mamluk Empire, such as the *ulu beğ* (meaning the *amir al-kabir*, at that time Korkmas min Arkmas); the governor (*na'ib*) of Damascus, (Şam) Sibay; the head of the armoury (*emir al-silah*), Dawlat Bey; the *na'ib* of Aleppo, Hayir Bek min Yilbay; the *kâtib al-sır*, Mahmud b. Aca; the *nâzir al-bass*, 'Ala' al-din b. al-İmam; the head of the chancellery (*davâdâr*, *divitdar* in the document), Azdamur min 'Ali Bay (or, after the latter's death in September or October 1507, Tumanbay al-Aşraf) and the caliph (*halife*), al-Mustamsik billah Ya'kub. The document does not give the names, only the offices of the Mamluk dignitaries receiving gifts. (I would very much like to thank my

Turco-Mongol tradition, this measure was an old-fashioned Turkic convention for sending gifts.⁵⁵ The magical number of nine for presents to neighbouring Muslim rulers points to a shared semiotic code.

The reason for the opulent Ottoman token of friendship for the otherwise rather problematic Mamluks must have been the Porte's concerns about the aggressive wheeling and dealing of the Persian shah, Ismail, who attracted not only followers from Anatolia but, in the spring of 1507, had also crossed the Ottoman border on a punitive expedition against Alaeddevle, the prince of Dulkadir.⁵⁶ The arrival of the Ottoman delegation with the gifts in Cairo coincided with the news that Safavid troops had attacked the Mamluk frontier and advanced as far as Malatya.⁵⁷ Thus, the Ottoman offerings were an overture to a possible alliance of convenience and the slaves embodied the hope that a pro-Ottoman faction would come to the fore at the Mamluk court. This example indicates that the motivation for presenting male slaves as gifts was not very different in diplomatic traffic to the domestic sphere; in both cases, the mantle of friendship disguised an aspiration for influence, which ultimately meant an expansion of personal power.

Negative feelings, diplomatic gifts and Realpolitik

Due to the nature of the sources (mainly treasury registers and the like), we cannot discern any negative emotions in domestic gift traffic. In diplomatic offerings, however, we sometimes sense anger, threat and contempt. Yet, narrative sources reporting such instances are not always reliable and their use requires much care, as the following case shows.

On 30 November 1510, the Ottoman sultan dispatched a set of offerings to Shah Ismail of Iran.⁵⁸ Although the gift package complied with the standard sacred number of nine, the Ottoman record does not label the recipient as a 'shah,' but 'sheikh' and calls him *mir-i vilayet-i Acem* ('lord of the dominion of Persia'). This debasing reference points to negative feelings on the Ottoman side, but in all likelihood, it was only used in the domestic documentation, not in the letter actually accompanying the gifts. The Porte engaged in a similar practice when dealing with the

colleague Christian Mauder who generously shared his knowledge of late Mamluk prosopography and political atmosphere with me.) However, Kemal Beğ brought the gifts for these people (except for the *ulu beğ*) back on 27 December 1507, and they were incorporated into the royal treasury. The story behind this strange refusal to accept the Ottoman state gifts remains untold.

⁵⁵ See GERHARD DOERFER, *Türkische und mongolische Elemente im Neupersischen* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), vol. II, 624–9, note 976. For evidence of this practice at the Mamluk court, see IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 206. The Mamluks had even adopted a Turkish word for it, which they Arabianised as *toquziât* ('gift of nine items'); IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 206.

⁵⁶ See FARUK SÜMER, *Safevî Devletinin Kuruluşu ve Gelişmesinde Anadolu Türklerinin Rolü. (Şah İsmail ile Halefeleri ve Anadolu Türkleri)* (Ankara: Güven Matbaası, 1976), 28–9; HANNA SOHRWEIDE, 'Der Sieg der Safawiden in Persien und seine Rückwirkung auf die Schiiten Anatoliens im 16. Jahrhundert,' *Der Islam* XLI (1965): 142.

⁵⁷ CIHAN YÜKSEL MUSLU, *The Ottomans and the Mamluks: Imperial Diplomacy and Warfare in the Islamic World* (London: Tauris, 2014), 167. IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 88.

⁵⁸ MC 71, fol. 207a.

German *Kaiser*, who in the Porte's domestic records bears the title *Bec* or *Nemçe kralı* ('king of Vienna' or 'of Austria') up to the year 1700, but after 1606 this term is not used in the official correspondence.⁵⁹

Despite the offending form of address, as far as we can see, Bayezid II's offerings to his Persian antagonist in 1510 were devoid of any hidden hostile message. Even religious asides matching the title of 'sheikh' were absent. The gifts were put together in two instalments; a number of fabrics, mainly different varieties of velvet (probably from stocks in the royal treasury), were taken on 11 November 1510, while the bulk of the items were recorded 19 days later, on 30 November.⁶⁰

The second set of gifts was clearly meant for a ruler and can be considered a classic package for the sixteenth century. It contained what was at this time a virtually obligatory silver drinking set, composed of tankards, trays, longneck-bottles, water jugs (*maşraba-yı abî*), large wine cups (*deve tabanı*) and an assortment of goblets. The goblets originated in Hungary, Dubrovnik and Trabzon, thus indicating – at least for the pieces from Hungary and Dubrovnik – that they were recycled gifts.⁶¹ The fabric section predominantly comprised velvets, imports from Italy (*Frenğî* in the document),⁶² but also weaves from Bursa. The Italian fabrics were crimson velvet heavily worked with gold (*müzzehbe-i sengin*); gold-brocaded voided velvet (*müzzehbe-i çatma*) in crimson, light grey (*serma'î*), violet (*benefî*) and honey yellow; gold-brocaded dotted (*benek*) velvet; plain double-napped (*dü-havî*) velvet; light satins (*atlas*), plain, dotted and with a *çatma* (i.e., embossed) pattern; and plain *kemba* in crimson, lemon yellow and azure. The fabrics from Bursa included voided and dotted brocaded velvet, as well as striped (*alaca*) and uncut (*rişte*) velvet. Pigeon blue (*kefterî*) *kemba*, listed without its provenance, might have been an Ottoman product and the same is definitely true for the camelot (*murabba'*) from Ankara. A further luxurious woollen material destined for the royal court of Tabriz was scarlet (*sikarlat*), its place of production (probably Venice) again not being given. *Peşorî*, a *kemba* fabric, appears again without specifying its provenance. Three fur plates of sable, ermine and miniver (*keremiin*) respectively, thus forming the magic number nine, rounded off the clothing section. Nine bows (the register does not refer to arrows) alluded to the royal diversion of hunting, while nine walrus tusks (*dendan-ı mahî*)⁶³ indicated the sultan's access to exotica from alien lands. These items

⁵⁹ HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Symbolik, Selbstbild und Beschwichtigungsstrategien: Diplomatische Geschenke der Osmanen für den Wiener Hof (17.-18. Jh.),' in *Frieden und Konfliktmanagement in interkulturellen Räumen: Das Osmanische Reich und die Habsburgermonarchie in der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds Arno Strohmeier, Norbert Spannenberger and Robert Pech (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 268–75.

⁶⁰ MC 71, fol. 207a.

⁶¹ ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory,' 43, suspects *ünğürüs* to be an allusion to the Hungarian florin (*ongaro* in Italian) 'as the source of the metal.'

⁶² For the identification of *Frenğî* as Italian for fabrics in sixteenth-century Ottoman records, see ROGERS, 'An Ottoman Palace Inventory,' 44.

⁶³ For the identification of 'fish teeth' as walrus ivory, see BERTHOLD LAUFER, 'Arabic and Chinese Trade in Walrus and Narwhal Ivory,' *T'oung Pao* Second Series 14, no. 3 (1913): 317–18, 333 and 337–38 and MATTHEW ELLIOTT GILLMAN, 'A Tale of Two Ivories: Elephant and Walrus,' *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma*, Serie VII, Historia del Arte (N. Época) 5 (2017): 86. For the significance of walrus tusks in the

would have emphasised his power and wealth, while at the same time highlighting the royal status of the recipient.

Iran was famous for its silk production, and Persian raw silk formed the basis of Bursa's silk industry. To send Italian and Ottoman silk fabrics and woollens to Tabriz looks at first glance like carrying coals to Newcastle. Yet, plain broadcloth and velvets were rare in Iran and had to be acquired from Portuguese traders in the Persian Gulf, as Marc'Antonio Pigafetta reported in 1567.⁶⁴ These fabrics would therefore have been most welcome in Tabriz.

Robes of honour for the sultan?

This gift parcel had an antecedent. Hasan Beg Rumlu reports that in 1504–5 an envoy of Bayezid II brought 'appropriate presents'⁶⁵ for Shah Ismail. This embassy was sent to felicitate Shah Ismail on his success in conquering Fars and Iraq. Bayezid's envoy is, however, reported to have been severely humiliated at the court of Tabriz.⁶⁶ According to Hasan Beg Rumlu, the Persian counter-gift, sent with the returning ambassador, contained robes of honour.⁶⁷ This account seems to point to an insult, as robes of honour were always given in a downward movement and thus they were here clearly intended to abase the recipient.

Drowning the envoy in opulence

Our archival source, the *'in'amat defteri*, on 23 July 1505 lists a number of gifts handed over to 'Ahmed Beğ, head of the divan secretaries (*parvancıyan*), messenger of Ismail, sheikh, [and] lord (*mir*) of the dominion of Persia.'⁶⁸ Ahmed Beğ received the enormous sum of 40,000 *akçe* cash (5,000 *akçe* labelled 'service pay,' *ulufe*, and 35,000 *akçe* 'honorarium,' *tesriif*)⁶⁹, a sur-kaftan of red 'Frankish' (Italian) velvet heavily worked with

Ottoman context, see HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Solomon's Unicorn,' in *Kanûnî Sultan Süleyman ve Dönemi: Yeni Kaynaklar, Yeni Yaklaşımlar/Suleyman the Lawgiver and his Reign: New Sources, New Approaches*, eds M. Fatih Çalışır, Suraiya Faroqhi, and M. Şakir Yılmaz (Istanbul: İbn Haldun Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2020), 340–1.

⁶⁴ MARC'ANTONIO PIGAFETTA, *Itinerario da Vienna a Costantinopoli*, ed. Daria Perocco (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2008), 246. SINEM ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1501-1618' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2012), 60.

⁶⁵ HASAN BEĞ RÜMLÜ, *A Chronicle of the Early Safavids: Being the Absann 't-Tawarih of Hasan-i Rumli* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1931), vol. I, 86, vol. II (English translation), (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1934), 37 (paraphrase). ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 11.

⁶⁶ SIDNEY NETTLETON FISHER, *The Foreign Relations of Turkey, 1481-1512* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948), 94.

⁶⁷ HASAN BEĞ RÜMLÜ, *A Chronicle of the Early Safavids*, vol. I, 86–7. ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 12. Much later, in 1583, Shah Khodabande sent a dark green silk velvet kaftan to Murad III: TIM STANLEY, 'Ottoman Gift Exchange: Royal Give and Take,' in *Gifts of the Sultan: The Arts of Giving at the Islamic Courts*, ed. Linda Komaroff (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 150, fig. 134; yet we do not know whether the Safavid court called this piece a robe of honour.

⁶⁸ MC 71, fol. 68b.

⁶⁹ In these years, an unskilled construction labourer would earn around 5 *akçe* per day, see PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar*, 69.

gold, a red *miraborî*-dress⁷⁰ of plain Italian velvet, three sorts of velvet from Bursa, which were gold-brocaded with the dots of the *chintamani* pattern, striped (or multi-coloured) and uncut, all in two dress-lengths respectively. Red *kemba* from Amasya is noted in the same lengths, while *peşorî*,⁷¹ apparently a variety of *kemba*, came in ten dress-lengths. Two plates of sable fur completed the sartorial part. In addition, four ‘mixed’ (*memzuç*; in all likelihood niello) tankards, four silver trays and ten wine goblets were included in the gift package. Four of them were large, called ‘camel sole’ (*deve tabanı*), and the others are termed *Laşî*.⁷²

Eight men of the envoy’s retinue were outfitted as well, and two of them were able to pocket 3,000 *akçe* each. Furthermore, the group’s treasurer was awarded a ‘customary bonus’ (*adeî*) of 8,420 *akçe* and the *çavuş* accompanying the delegation took 1,160 *akçe* with him.⁷³ The envoy and his retinue thus received the full programme of first-rate honours. This cornucopia of presents seems at first glance to suggest that at least a part of them were destined for the shah in Tabriz.

In this context it is interesting to see that on 16 April 1504 the register lists almost the same inventory of gifts for the envoy of the Akkoyunlu Prince Alvand, who is designated – in the same manner as Ismail – ‘lord of the dominion of Persia’ (*mir-i vilayet-i ‘Acem*).⁷⁴ He had been defeated by Shah Ismail and fled to Diyarbakır, where he died at an uncertain date after early October 1504.⁷⁵ Around the same time (20 April 1504), for the legate of Mengli Giray, the khan of the Crimean Tatars, the Ottoman protocol prescribed a treatment that was considered honourable, albeit much less opulent. He obtained 7,000 *akçe* and two luxurious robes of honour⁷⁶ and was thus for the Porte almost on the same social level as the envoy of the Hungarian king (23 July 1504).⁷⁷

Big cats for the sultan

It is hardly likely that Shah Ismail’s envoy would have arrived empty-handed at the royal court of Istanbul. The mere fact that he got the whole range of top-notch presents contemplated by Ottoman protocol suggests a delivery of clearly honorific gifts from Iran. Robes of honour would undoubtedly have been embarrassing and

⁷⁰ This is a robe of honour frequently mentioned in registers of the sixteenth century. According to Michael Rogers it is an adaption of a Mamluk robe of honour: ROGERS, ‘An Ottoman Palace Inventory,’ 45.

⁷¹ The fabric appears in the document quoted in note 14 as *kemba-yı peşorî* and also among the gifts (*in’am*) for Khan ‘Adil Giray on 17 February 1554; BOA, D.BRZ d. 20617, p. 39. See also MİNE ESİNER ÖZEN, ‘Türkçe’de Kumaş Adları,’ *Tarih Dergisi* 33 (1980–1): 321.

⁷² We find further mentions of this type in later bookkeeping entries (in the *ruşnamçe* register) of the royal inner treasury, BOA, D.BRZ d. 20614, pp. 27, 144, 152.

⁷³ MC 71, fol. 68b.

⁷⁴ ÖMER LÜTFÜ BARKAN, ‘İstanbul Saraylarına ait Muhasebe Defterleri,’ *Belgeler* IX, no. 13 (1979): 365 note 383.

⁷⁵ See JOHN E. WOODS, *The Aqquyunlu Clan, Confederation, Empire: A Study in 15th/16th Century Turko-Iranian Politics* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976): 169–77 and 294 note 129.

⁷⁶ BARKAN, ‘İstanbul Saraylarına,’ 366 note 385.

⁷⁷ MC 71, fol. 34b. The envoy of the Hungarian king received less money though (5,000 *akçe*).

certainly resulted in less friendly treatment by the Ottoman side. Thus, it is rather implausible that Hasan Beg Rumlu's allegations of Bayezid II receiving robes of honour were based on reality. Moreover, our register has an entry saying that the four 'leopard-keepers (*parsçıyan*) who came with the messenger of Sheikh Ismail' received a gracious gift of 1,000 *akçe* per person.⁷⁸ These keepers must have been accompanying some leopards (or cheetahs) brought as presents for the sultan.⁷⁹ If so, this was a true royal gift. In the Ottoman (and probably also the Safavid) context, offering a big cat such as a panther or leopard to a foreign monarch evidently went hand in hand with acknowledging the recipient's royal status.

The question of whether or what kind of gifts legates presented to a political foe would have always involved a dimension of propaganda, and narratives such as chronicles were flagships for this kind of image projection. Hence, it is quite natural that the archival evidence should show a different image from the one we read from the narrative presented by Hasan Rumlu, who clearly embellished his account with *topoi*.

Robes of honour as a message in kind

Depending on the political situation, diplomatic gifts were a perfect means for subtly communicating messages the donor did not want to state in so many words. A good example is the addition of robes of honour in gift dispatches to the court of Vienna in the seventeenth century. The Peace of Zsitvatorok, in 1606, had in the Habsburg's eyes ended the tributary relationship with the Ottoman Empire, a viewpoint the Ottoman side did not share. The 1616 Peace of Vienna, however, solidified the Viennese position. The Porte reacted again and again with demands for tribute and in 1650 and 1665 added robes of honour to their gifts for the *Kaiser*.⁸⁰ This was a clear message, although the demand for tribute proved to be unenforceable in Realpolitik, the Ottoman view remained unchanged. While sending robes of honour to Muslim monarchs usually meant a serious threat of war, the court of Vienna might not even have understood the implication. Thus, the message only had effect at domestic level.

Threats

The practice of diplomatic gifting gave ample opportunity for gruesome threats. After his victory over the Uzbeks in the battle of Marv, in 1510, Shah Ismail sent the cranium of Uzbek khan, Shaybani, parcelled in a nice box and accompanied by a Koran and a

⁷⁸ MC 71, fol. 68b. At that time, an unskilled building labourer would have to work more than half a year to earn this sum; see PAMUK, *İstanbul ve Diğer Kentlerde 500 Yıllık Fiyatlar*, 69.

⁷⁹ According to Ibn İyâs, in the summer of 1512 an envoy of Shah Ismail brought gifts to the Mamluk court, among which seven cheetahs. Originally nine of these animals had been sent, but two died on the way. Before being presented to Qansawh al-Gawrî, they were caparisoned with silken covers; IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 148.

⁸⁰ See REINDL-KIEL, 'Symbolik, Selbstbild und Beschwichtigungsstrategien,' 268–74.

prayer carpet, to Qansawh al-Gawrī.⁸¹ Allegedly, Ismail dispatched the rest of Shaybanī's straw-stuffed severed head to Bayezid II.⁸²

Marino Sanuto reports another telling case in one of his diaries: in 1516 Selim I 'the Grim' sent a messenger to Venice to convey the news about the sultan's victory over the Safavids in the region of Mardin. As tangible proof, the envoy brought the severed head, stuffed with straw, of a senior Safavid commander. The sultan writes in his accompanying letter that 'because of the good friendship and peace between [him] and the Signoria' he 'was sending his slave, the *çavuş* Mustafa with the head of one of the notables (*di uno primo signor*) of Bagdad, named "Gasbin".⁸³ Of course, the real purpose of this macabre gift was to menace the Serenissima and thwart potential military actions in the West during Selim's expeditions of conquest in the East. Ghoulish threats of this kind were part of the toolkit of foreign policy, particularly during Selim I's reign. In 1515, his envoy had shocked Qansawh al-Gawrī by presenting him with three severed heads: of the Dulkadirid Alaeddevle, his son and his vizier.⁸⁴ As the Mamluks regarded the principality of Dulkadir as their own backyard, this signalled doom, although its territory had long been a buffer zone and apple of discord between the two empires.

Conclusion

Our brief tour through a number of sources dealing with gifts has shown that positive emotions such as affection and friendship tend to be the exception rather than the rule in Ottoman gift traffic. This makes the applicability of Andrews' love theory somewhat questionable. In the domestic sphere as well as on the diplomatic stage gifts defined the donor's self-view and image of the recipient. Between individuals of (approximately) equal standing the gifts had to be fitting for the recipient's rank, thus showing approval of the person's place in society. Diplomatic offerings from ruler to ruler were, in general, no different. As one of the fundamental principles in Ottoman society was *kendü halinde olmak* (lit. 'to be in the condition of the self'), which meant in pre-modern times to behave in conformity with one's social status, giving a suitable gift could help to persuade proper conduct on the part of the recipient. This might have been the idea behind the Ottoman dispatch of robes of honour to Vienna, for from the perspective of the Porte, it indicated to the unbelievers their appropriate place vis-à-vis the Ottoman sultan.

In another field of cultural history we observe a similar approach. Christiane Czygan points out that Shah İsmail and Selim I, two antagonistic rulers, used both poetry as a means of propaganda. İsmail's target group were the unrefined masses of Turkoman nomads and dervishes, while Selim's poems intended to fit into the image of an ideal Islamic ruler mastering sword and pen at the same high level. Czygan

⁸¹ IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 135.

⁸² ARCAK, 'Gifts in Motion,' 12–13.

⁸³ MARINO SANUTO, *I Diarii*. XXII (Venice, 1887), c. 460 and 462. The letter was sent on 2 July 1516 in Konya.

⁸⁴ IBN İYÂS, *Alltagsnotizen*, 203.

suggests that Selim I's sophisticated poetry also 'served to teach the Shah a lesson in proper manners', 'befitting the dignity of a ruler', i.e. not to associate with nomads and other rural folk,⁸⁵ which the Ottoman elite disdained and usually ignored. To teach others their proper place in society in such an indirect manner must have been a well-tried method to 'educate' ignorant persons of rank.

In the Ottoman elite, including the royal family, there was a common code for expressing emotions. Individuals would communicate their affections and feelings of friendship by gifting objects close to the body, symbolising intimacy.

In the field of diplomatic traffic, serious warnings could be transmitted with horrifying items that were certainly effective in spreading terror. It is probably no accident that negative emotions in diplomatic gifts are easier to discern than positive ones. Ottoman chronicles centring on the sultan as the ultimate source of power refer time and again to the ruler's wrath but scarcely mention his positive emotions. Should we understand this as a means of communicating royal power?

Although Selim the Grim's diplomatic 'gifts' seem to tell another story, in general it was Realpolitik and prudence that determined the Porte's approach to its antagonists. Ottoman protocol directed all the anger to the chancellery records at home, while sending, albeit between gritted teeth, honorific gifts to the foe. Evidently, the Ottoman administration preferred discretion when coping with anger or contempt. A telling act in this respect (in the late seventeenth century) was the Grand Vizier's regular visit to the toilet directly before receiving a non-Muslim envoy, who would kiss the hem of his kaftan in greeting.⁸⁶ Expressing emotions with gifts was however an extremely rare practice for the officials who were responsible for diplomatic gifts.

In any case, we can conclude that both in the domestic cycle as well as on the diplomatic stage, Ottoman gift traffic was used as a – costly – means of communication, even though recipients outside the Middle Eastern realm might not have fully understood its semiotic code. For the Ottomans, despite not expressing all they had hidden in their hearts, gifts were expensive messages in kind.

⁸⁵ CHRISTIANE CZYGAN, "Masters of the Pen: the Divans of Selimi and Muhibbi", in Abdulrahim Abu-Husayn, ed., *1516: The Year that Changed the Middle East*. (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2021), 114.

⁸⁶ See HEDDA REINDL-KIEL, 'Audiences, Banquets, Garments and Kisses: Encounters with the Ottoman Sultan in the 17th Century,' in *The Ceremonial of Audience: Transcultural Approaches*, eds Eva Orthmann and Anna Kollatz (Göttingen: Bonn University Press-V&R unipress, 2019), 179.